GREAT AMERICAN CINEMAS

THE MADISON CIVIC CENTER

Madison, Wisconsin

Located two blocks from the Madison State Capitol, the former Capitol Theatre today thrives as an integral part of the Madison Civic Center. Renamed the Oscar Mayer Theatre after the city's famed food manufacturer, the theatre auditorium retains much of its original design, although the lobby has been completely renovated to allow access to other areas of the complex.

As a result of the popularity of the Orpheum Theatre, built on State Street in 1927, the Capitol opened a year later directly across the street. Both were designed by C.W. and George Rapp, master theatre designers of the day. The Capitol's Spanish baroque terra-cotta exterior facade (complete with Romanesque windows) remains, although the Theatre's original marquee, display cases and towering sign have been replaced by a subdued brick front. The auditorium interior was, and still is, dominated by heavily draped baroque archways.

Purchased by the City of Madison in 1974, the Theatre and the adjacent Montgomery Ward building became the focal points of the planned civic and cultural center. Completed in 1980 at a cost of $7.5 million, the Madison Civic Center now houses an art museum and the 340-seat Isthumus Playhouse, in addition to the 2,200-seat Oscar Mayer. The old Capitol lobby was redesigned into "The Crossroads," a multi-storied lobby connecting four levels that also includes an informal theatre space. The stage was enlarged, new lighting sound systems installed, plaster surfaces refinished and carpets rewoven from original designs. Two large chandeliers suspended on either side of the stage were created from five smaller pre-existing fixtures.

A home to numerous area performing-arts groups, the Theatre also welcomes guest performers in the fields of dance, theatre, music and comedy. One of the Theatre's more popular features is its silent-film series, where audience members see and hear silent films the way they were intended—with the accompaniment of a "mighty" Barton organ. The Barton has been housed in the Theatre since its original 1928 opening—one of few such instruments to claim that honor—and has been rebuilt and restored to the tune of $32,000. A marvelous evening will be in store for audience members on May 21st when the Madison Symphony Orchestra, joined by organist Dennis James, performs the musical accompaniment to Lon Chaney's 1925 masterpiece *The Phantom of the Opera*. For information, call the Madison Civic Center at 608-266-9055. *AMC*

—BY ANN MCGUIRE